



## Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making

### Introduction

One of the Council of Europe's priorities in the field of gender equality is to promote balanced participation between women and men in political and public decision-making. Despite progress achieved in Council of Europe member states, women are still seriously under-represented in political and public decision-making and continue to face difficulties in becoming involved in equitable numbers in the political process.

Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making is a matter of human rights and democracy. Decisions made by political and public bodies have long-term consequences and it is important that the views and interests of women are fully represented in these spheres.

The Final Declaration of the 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of Council of Europe member states (Strasbourg, 1997)

stresses the importance of balanced representation of both sexes in society.

In the Action Plan adopted at the 3rd Summit of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, May 2005), the Heads of State and Government underlined that equal participation of both women and men is a crucial element of democracy and confirmed their commitment to achieving real equality between women and men.

### Activities

Under the main responsibility of the *Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG)*, numerous activities to promote balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making have been undertaken, both in partnership with other Council of Europe bodies and other international organisations.

#### Equality and democracy

The Council of Europe first started working on balanced participation over 20 years ago. Starting with a Plan of Action to promote equal participation, the work continued with the First European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Strasbourg, 1986) which was devoted to *Equality between women and men in political life – Policy and strategies to achieve equality in decision-making*.

In 1988, the Committee of Ministers adopted a *Declaration on equality between women and men*, which stated that gender equality is an integral part of human rights and a prerequisite for genuine democracy and emphasised the importance of including women in all areas of decision-making. This was followed up, in 1989, by a seminar on *The democratic principle of equal representation* where the concept of parity was first discussed.

The Declaration on *Equality between women and men as a fundamental criterion of democracy* adopted during the 4th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between

Women and Men (Istanbul 1997) constitutes a practical instrument for all those working to increase the participation of women in decision-making in general.

In 2000 the CDEG published a report on *Positive action in the field of equality between women and men*, including in political and public life. In 2002, a study entitled *Going for gender balance* was published. It provides examples of good practices for balanced representation in political and social decision-making and presents awareness-raising strategies.

In September 2003 a seminar on the *Participation of young women in political life* brought together national and regional officials, representatives of youth organisations and academics. The introductory report was published under the heading *Genderware – the Council of Europe and the participation of women in political life*.

#### Women in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building

The Council of Europe brought up the issue of women's role in conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict democratic processes in 2001. The inequality in the balance of power between women and men tends to exacerbate in times of armed conflicts and the lack of gender balance is particularly striking in peace processes and conflict settlements.

Women's participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts was the subject of a seminar organised in Strasbourg in 2001 and in

January 2003, the Ministers participating in the *Fifth Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men* (Skopje) adopted a Resolution encouraging the integration of a gender perspective in all activities aimed at conflict prevention and resolution. As a follow-up, the CDEG published a report on *the Role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflict, for peace building and for democratisation* in 2004 and prepared a recommendation on *the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building*.

#### Recommendation (2003) 3

In March 2003 the Committee of Ministers adopted *Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making*. This recommendation defines balanced participation as a minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life.

The recommendation puts forward eight objectives to be implemented by the governments of member states to promote balanced participation. They include protection of equal civil and political rights, individual voting rights, revising legislation, setting targets and encouraging women to participate in political decision-making, monitoring, etc. It also proposes legislative and administrative measures as well as supportive measures to be adopted by member states. It calls on governments to

monitor and evaluate progress in achieving balanced participation in political and public life. Ten indicators for measuring progress in this field are included in the appendix of the recommendation (para. 44).

To monitor progress in the implementation of Recommendation Rec (2003) 3, a questionnaire on gender segregated data on the participation of women and men in political and public

decision-making was drawn up. Two rounds of monitoring have been completed in 2005 and 2008.

In 2004 the situation of *Women in Diplomacy* was the subject of a seminar which brought together women diplomats a number of Council of Europe member states.

In 2004 the subject of *Parental Leave in Council of Europe member states* was examined

and a study published. It looks at existing legislation and identifies gaps in national legislation as well as giving patterns and trends concerning take-up of this leave by women and men.

In 2005 the European Commission for Democracy through Law ("Venice Commission") adopted a *Declaration on Women's participation in elections*.

## Women's representation in politics in the member states (September 2008)

(Source: Council of Europe Questionnaire on sex-disaggregated data on the participation of women and men in political and public decision-making)

There are two women heads of state (elected): Finland and Ireland, and two heads of government: Germany and Ukraine.

The average number of women ministers is 28.6%.

Three member states have reached the recommended minimum of 40% of women in their national parliament: Sweden 46%, Finland 41.5% and the Netherlands 41.3%. Belgium (37.3%), Denmark (38%) and Norway (37.9%) are close to reaching the required minimum. The average representation of women in national parliaments is 21.7%.

In regional parliaments, the average representation of women is similarly low: 20.8%.

Spain is the only member state to have reached the recommended minimum of 40% of women. The number of women heads of regional government is significantly lower: most member states have no women heads of regional government while in some member states representation ranges from 2% to 11%, with an average of 2.8%.

## Adopted texts

### Committee of Ministers

- *Recommendation Rec (2003) 3* on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making

### Parliamentary Assembly

- *Resolution 1079 (1996)* on increased representation of women in the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly

- *Recommendation 1413 (1999)* on equal representation in political life
- *Resolution 1348 (2003)* on gender-balanced representation in the Parliamentary Assembly
- *Recommendation 1665 (2004)* on conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women
- *Recommendation 1676 (2004)* on women's participation in elections

### Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

- *Resolution 85 (1999)* and *Recommendation 68 (1999)* on women's participation in political life in the regions of Europe
- *Recommendation 111 (2002)* on women's individual voting rights: a democratic requirement

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